

you'll forget about your days away by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Fairy Tale, Angst, Depression, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Happy Ending, M/M, Panic Attacks, Pining, Trauma

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven, Jane Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-01-03

Updated: 2018-01-03

Packaged: 2022-04-03 15:13:40

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 14,354

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Look. This is what Will's going to do: wait for the hidden folk to appear, resist all their temptations, and make them give Mike back.

you'll forget about your days away

Author's Note:

Title from [More Colors](#) by Kidswaste feat. Chelsea Cutler

The thing is – when you're trapped in the Upside Down, or it's trapped in you – if a flicker of brightness shows up, you hold on to it with all you've got. And sometimes, it's hard to stop holding on.

It's okay, that Will clings to his family, because they cling to him too. They're like a Velcro family these days. Mom and Jonathan ambush him with hugs and fight for who gets to have Will in their room at nights. Even though it means they have to keep the lights on.

But then there's Mike.

Will dreams about him a lot lately: Mike uncertainly taking his hand out of his pocket to wave while Will shivers in a hospital bed; Mike gripping Will's shoulders, demanding if he's okay; Mike silhouetted by a halogen halo, listing all the things about Will that he loves.

Will knows what happens when you hold on too tight: it makes people feels suffocated, and break out of your grip.

And Will just – couldn't deal with that. He needs all the light he can get right now. So he does his best not to cling.

*

Will's safe now. Everyone tells him so.

The sun rises every morning, huge and bright in the winter sky, like it never did in the Upside-Down, like he never thought it would again.

And even though, sometimes, Will thinks he can feel the Shadow-Monster crawling coldly around the back of mind, all he has to do, if he gets really scared, is ask Jane to check.

Will doesn't know Jane that well, but she has almost the kindest eyes he's ever seen. Chief Hopper still doesn't let her out of the cabin much . But Mike visits her – like, a hundred times a week – and sometimes Will goes, too.

'No Shadow Monster,' Jane tells him every time, and squeezes his hand. 'You're safe, Will.'

He's safe.

*

Will and his family spend all Christmas Day in a pile on the couch, watching movies while snow falls, light and hesitant, outside.

Dad calls in the afternoon, but he doesn't have time to talk that long, which is a relief, because Will can never think of what to say to him. He always feels like Dad gets bored when Will talks, even though Mom says that's not true.

After he hangs up, a memory bubbles up of Bob giggling at a dumb comic Will drew for him. It was about Chester being a super-villain, on a mission to eat all the burritos in the world. Will doesn't know why he's thinking about that.

Anyway, Christmas is good. Will gets new watercolours and a book he really wanted, and they finish a whole batch of mince pies.

In the afternoon, Mike and Nancy show up unannounced, snow glittering in their dark hair, bearing a dish of Mrs Wheeler's stuffing.

Nancy persuades Jonathan to play Christmas songs on his guitar so they can all sing along, which is something Jonathan would never've done in a million years, before he met Nancy. They both stay 'til it's pitch-black out, and that's when Jane and Hopper show up, back from a trip to visit Jane's mom.

Mike sits shoulder-to-shoulder between Jane and Will. They all watch Mom and Hopper and Nancy and Jonathan dancing around tipsily to Stevie Wonder.

Mike sometimes dips his head to mutter things into Will's ear – 'Look,

Nancy's trying to get her hand on his butt!'

It's the closest they've been in a while, since – well.

Anyway. It's nice.

Will dreams about Bob that night; about this one afternoon Bob stood out in their overgrown garden and made Will run around him – then spin and run at the same time – then spin and run while also trying to tilt on an axis, stumbling and giggling.

It was supposed to help Will get how the Earth's orbit around the Sun created seasons, but it just made him so dizzy he had to lie on the grass until Bob swung him over his shoulder and carried him indoors, screaming and laughing.

Then Bob vanishes and the same old nightmares come.

Will spends so much time running in his sleep that he's always exhausted by morning.

*

'Good magic,' says Mike decisively, blasting through Will's bedroom door.

Will startles violently and tries to pretend like it was a sneeze. Mike raises an eyebrow at him.

He throws his Player's Manual onto Will's bed and comes crashing down after it. He had his aunt's wedding rehearsal today and he's still wearing his tie, navy blue silk, although he's yanked it halfway down his chest.

'Uh, come in?' says Will.

He's glad Mike's elephant-stomping into his room again. A while ago – the day after Jane closed the gate, actually – Mike came over and he was. Well, they both were. Pretty over-emotional. And they both acted – different. Out of character.

And afterwards, things were strange and awkward for a while.

But now, they're almost back to normal. Which is a relief.

'Bad magic always has a good counterpart,' says Mike, gangly legs kicking the air. 'Like the light side of the Force. El's our jedi knight, but we've had a crap deal otherwise.'

He flicks determinedly through the Manual.

'You know D&D's just a game, right?' says Will. Mike looks up at him, hand resting on the *Fae* entry, eyes narrowed like they always do when he's ready for a fight.

'Two years ago, none of us thought demogorgons were real.'

'The Upside Down's not really *magic*, though. It's just... evil.'

Will thinks he sees spores floating behind Mike's shoulder. Feels goosebumps prick up on his forearms, his throat tighten up. Blinks, and they're gone.

'Even Jane's powers come from bad guys,' he says.

'But – if there are evil supernatural creatures, maybe there are good ones. Like, dragons and fairies and stuff.'

'Those're just myths.'

'You don't *know* that,' says Mike, with fire in his voice. 'How about we take a bet on it? And we can dedicate a month to searching for good magic, and if we find nothing, you win.'

Will thinks of following Mike over barbed-wire fences and into dark, unknown forests. The dark trees seeming to breathe and move around him as the walls of Castle Byers flapped in an eerie wind –

I'm safe now.

'Where would we even start?' he says gloomily.

'Dunno. I asked El; she can't find anything without knowing what it is first. Maybe we could ask Nancy. She's been doing a lot of research into the supernatural. You in?'

Will looks out the window. 'Maybe Dustin would want to instead.'

'Oh,' says Mike oddly. 'Sure.'

He bounces to his feet, pauses at the door.

'You doing anything for your birthday? That *Last Dragon* movie looks really good.'

'I think I'll just spend it at home.'

'Oh,' says Mike again. 'Well. See you Monday.'

'Yep,' says Will, and then Mike's gone, and like usual Will's left running over the conversation, wishing he could have done it all differently. Or just be a different person.

*

On the morning of Will's fourteenth birthday, Mike and the rest of the party meet him at the lockers like usual. They all seem nonchalant, and Will thinks maybe – they've forgotten. He wouldn't mind. There's been a lot going on.

All through first period, though, Mike keeps glancing at Will and fidgeting with his pen and shuffling restlessly around in his seat.

Then, at lunch, Dustin says, 'Oh, shit, the English assignment! I started it, but then we were busy all weekend with your bir–'

Mike, Max and Lucas all lunge to cover Dustin's mouth at once.

'Bird watching,' Lucas says, as Dustin struggles to free himself.

Mike nods enthusiastically. 'We were bird watching. It was so exciting – we waited for six hours until *finally*, when it was getting dark, we saw this incredible – um –'

He looks at Lucas, who looks to Max.

'Sparrow,' she says.

Mike glares at her.

When Will gets home, he finds Mom's made him a huge banana cake with lemon icing and piped a blue, twirly 14 on the top. She's at work 'til five, but Jonathan's there to help him unwrap his birthday present: this *enormous* red-and-gold backgammon set. When he opens it out it covers the whole kitchen table.

Will and Jonathan are on their second game and third cake slices when the walkie-talkie in Will's bedroom crackles to life.

'Come in, Will?'

He jumps to his feet, almost knocking the board to the floor.

'Easy,' Jonathan says, laughing, but Will's already running to his room.

'Mike?' he says.

'Check your letterbox, okay? Over.'

He finds an envelope with *TOP SECRET! For Will Byers' Eyes Only* in Mike's messy scrawl. Inside is a hand-drawn map of his neighborhood. Written on the map in red ink, beside a large X, is: *You Won't Find The Treasure Here.*

And at the bottom: *You have one hour to solve all fourteen clues and find your birthday present. Call Mike or Dustin if you get stuck.*

A treasure hunt. That's what they were doing.

The X is out in the forest, near Castle Byers. It's not far, maybe five minutes' walk.

Will stares out at the fading sky, the dark woods. He closes his eyes and does his best to focus on his breath.

I'm safe.

His friends spent all weekend doing this for him.

It's fine – he'll just ask Jonathan to come.

But that's pathetic. It's five minutes away. He can do this alone. He'll just run there, now, quickly, before Jonathan even notices he's gone.

Will makes it two steps into the darkening woods before the panic overwhelms him.

He drops to his knees. The map falls from his hand to the ground.

Breathe, Will. You're safe. In, two, three, out, two, three. You're safe.

Why can't he believe it?

'Will,' he hears, and then he feels big, gentle hands on his shoulders.

Jonathan carries Will all the way home, Will's legs wrapped around his waist like he's five years old again. He hugs Will close as he sobs into Jonathan's shoulder and gets his work shirt all snotty.

'Sorry.'

Jonathan just pushes his hair back and says, 'Wanna watch TV?'

'I think I might lie down for a bit.'

He's under the covers, thumbing through *Grimms' Fairytales*, when the walkie-talkie crackles on.

'How you going with the treasure hunt?' It's Dustin.

Will tenses.

'It's just, uh, we were kind of expecting you'd be here by now, dude. *The Last Dragon* starts in ten minutes. Let us know if you need help, all right? Over.'

The treasure must have been tickets. Will knows that was Mike's idea. He grabs his walkie-talkie, clears his throat, tries to make his voice normal.

'Sorry, guys, I'm – not going to make it in. I've, um, caught some kind of stomach flu, but the treasure hunt was amazing. Thanks so much, it must've taken you ages. Enjoy the movie! Over.'

He turns his walkie-talkie off and lies there for a long time.

Maybe an hour has passed when his bedroom door creaks open.

‘Will?’

Mom sounds odd, Will thinks, pushes back the covers, and Mike Wheeler’s there in his doorway, twisting his hands together. He’s in the cream, cable-knit sweater he got for Christmas – the only one that still fits him at all – and his dark hair’s all ruffled from the wind.

Will didn’t even hear the front door-knocker – he looks an idiot right now, his hair’s all staticky and crazy and his eyes are probably still red from crying –

‘Why aren’t you at the movie?’ Mike was so excited about it.

Mike shrugs and sits carefully down on Will’s bed so he doesn’t squash his feet.

‘It’s *your* birthday. The others wanted to come, but I thought maybe better just me.’

He thought right. Will doesn’t want them all seeing him like this. Will looks down at his comforter and his eyes get hot. *Don’t cry.*

Mike saves him by pouncing on the book on his bedside table. ‘What’s this?’

‘Oh, that’s – just a book of fairytales.’

Sometimes Will thinks he is finally getting over whatever this *thing* is and then Mike smiles, like he is right now, and ruins everything.

‘This one’s my favorite,’ Mike says, holding it up.

It’s *Sleeping Beauty*. Will snorts, thinking he’s joking.

‘Hey,’ says Mike, and lightly shoves at him. ‘What’s wrong with *Sleeping Beauty*?’

‘It’s funny. How can you fall in love with someone while they’re

unconscious?’

‘He fights through vicious thorns to get to her. It’s romantic as hell.’

‘Imagine her hundred-year morning breath.’

Mike snorts. ‘That stuff doesn’t matter if it’s love.’

‘But he doesn’t even know who she is .’

‘He knows enough,’ Mike says, wriggling on the bed to tuck his legs beneath him. ‘He knows she’s the one.’

‘How?’ says Will skeptically.

‘When it’s destiny, you *know*.’

‘Sappy,’ says Will, wrinkling his nose.

‘Hey, watch it, fairytale boy,’ Mike says, biffing one of Will’s teddy bears at him.

Will thinks of something and looks out the window.

‘Is that how you feel about Jane?’

‘El?’ Mike says, very serious all of a sudden. ‘I love El.’

Will knows. He remembers, when he got back from the Upside-Down, how Mike was – different. Staring out the window vacantly in class – sometimes shouting for no reason. Tears springing up that he’d fiercely wipe away.

Mike’s closer to his old self now she’s back – although none of them are ever really going to be close to their old selves again.

In some ways, Jane isn’t really back. She’s in hiding for another year. The only place Hopper seems happy leaving Jane is at the Byers household. Sometimes she comes over for movie nights: turns out Jane is a huge fan of movies, and Jonathan has a huge collection.

Will likes Jane. They have a lot in common, although none of it’s stuff they really want to talk about. They both have scars.

The other night, Jane came round to their place to watch *Dumbo*. When Dumbo lost his mother, Jane, to Will's surprise, snuggled up to Will, resting her head on his shoulder.

Jane's kind, and the bravest person Will knows. She has helped Will to be less afraid of the Shadow-Monster. Also he doesn't think he'll ever get tired of the game where she levitates M&Ms across the room and he catches them with his mouth.

He tries so hard not to be jealous of her for stupid reasons.

'El says I saved her,' Mike says now, distantly. 'I don't know. She *actually* saved my life, so – there's this bond, y'know. But I think after the Snow Ball we both realised it's not – like *that*.'

He points at the illustration on his lap, where the Prince has bent to kiss the sleeping Princess, her blond hair tumbling over the pillow, and his eyes flutter up to meet Will's.

But Mike and Jane love one another, and they *saved* one another, and they spend so much time together – they're practically a fairy story already.

'What's your favourite fairy tale?' Mike asks.

Will considers. 'The Elves and the Shoemaker.'

He likes how there are no bad guys.

Mike frowns, turns to the story. He's quiet for a while, reading. His dark hair is tumbling into his eyes, and Will resists the urge to reach out and gently brush it back.

'I know you don't have stomach flu,' Mike says suddenly.

'Huh?'

'What's the matter?' Mike looks up at him intently.

'I tried to do the treasure hunt,' Will says. 'I really did – I know you guys spent so long on it. But I just – I walked out to the forest, and – and – I kind of...' He mumbles the last word. 'Panicked.'

Mike goggles at him for a few seconds, then lunges to cover Will's hand with his own. Will startles a little. Mike's fingers are cooler than Will's. Mike's touch has the usual effect; he just hopes it's too dim to see the color of his face.

'I had a panic attack a couple weeks ago. They're the worst, huh?'" Mike says solemnly, and Will's heart jumps painfully. *Not you, too.*

'But you're not scared of anything.'

'I get scared as hell. But when I'm scared, I have to – *do* something, or it just gets worse. If I hide, or run, it feels like, I don't know. I'm letting the fear win.'

Will doesn't want to let the fear win. But he doesn't think he knows how to fight back any more.

'I'm sorry,' he says suddenly. 'About today. I ruined everything.'

'Hey,' says Mike, very gentle, and squeezes Will's hand. 'The whole point of a birthday is that you get to do what you want, right?'

Will doesn't say anything. Rain's starting to fall lightly outside, pattering on the roof; he imagines it drenching all the carefully-written clues, making the ink run in blurry smears down the paper.

'Have you had attacks before?' says Mike.

'I have them quite a lot these days,' Will admits dully. Mike's grip on his hand tightens to a vice.

'Why didn't you tell me?' he says, then corrects himself: 'No, I should've noticed.'

He hates that. Why should Mike have noticed? Will didn't ask him to. He feels like everyone's exhausting themselves just trying to lift Will's heavy weight. They should just leave him be.

He tugs his hand out of Mike's grip.

'You know,' Will mutters, 'you've already helped save me twice. You don't have to take care of me now as well.'

‘I know.’

‘Or give me pity visits.’

Mike’s mouth falls open. ‘Pity visits?’ he says, and now he looks angry.

‘I’d be fine if you left me alone.’

Mike tucks his feet underneath him on the bed and clenches his fists.

‘Well, good for you,’ he says sarcastically.

‘I didn’t mean it like that,’ Will says quickly. ‘I meant – it’s okay if you get tired of me. I don’t mind.’

He’s tired of himself.

Mike just looks confused. ‘I’m not tired of you. You’re my best friend. We’re going to be best friends forever, remember? We’re gonna be next-door-neighbors, yelling stuff at one another from our rocking chairs on our front porches.’

Will looks down and presses his lips together. God, why does every tiny thing make him want to cry these days?

Crying, panic attacks, general pathetic-ness – I couldn’t be doing a better job at being totally unattractive if I were reading a manual on it. The thought makes him almost laugh, but it comes out like a sob.

Mike shuffles over and wraps both his arms around Will, resting his head on his shoulder. Will shivers faintly before he can help it.

‘Besides,’ Mike says fiercely, turning his face and speaking into Will’s shoulder, the words all buzzy against his skin, ‘I *like* saving you. I like taking care of you.’

‘Sometimes I just want to lay in bed all day and never get up. You wouldn’t want to be around me when I’m like that.’

Zombie boy.

‘Wanna bet?’ says Mike. ‘I’m more worried you’ll get tired of me.’

Will snorts. As if.

‘You’ll need a better birthday present,’ says Mike, dreamily, releasing Will. ‘Since this one was a bust.’

‘It was the best present ever,’ Will protests. ‘It’s just me being dumb.’

Mike just flicks through the pages of the fairy-tale book, like his mind’s preoccupied.

*

Mike’s skipping class again. It’s different to before: he doesn’t shout at the teachers, or storm out of class, like he kept doing after Will got back from the Upside Down.

He just seems distracted.

Whenever anyone asks, ‘Mike, where *were* you today?’ he’ll just answer, ‘Research,’ and refuse to say any more about it.

Will’s own grades are slipping. He really does try. But his mind’s always foggy.

Monday rolls around again. There’s just three weeks to go before end-of-year exams, and the huge, gleaming expanse of summer.

Mike doesn’t show up first period.

Ms Ross asks Will to wait after English so she can discuss his falling grades, making her the third teacher this month. The others have been kind, understanding: Ms Ross isn’t like that.

‘You’d better pull yourself together, Byers,’ she says. ‘You and Mike used to be my best students, now look at you.’

‘Sorry, I–’

‘I don’t need excuses,’ she says. ‘I’ve read the papers; I know you’ve got ‘em. Don’t care.’

Will shrinks, but Ms Ross goes on.

‘However big this thing you’re dealing with, you have to be bigger, kid. You can’t let it beat you. You have too much potential to give up.’

Will doesn’t know what to say to that, so he just nods. Ms Ross sighs and opens the door for him to leave. He’s late to P.E. but he dawdles in the hallway.

The last P.E. module of the year is, tragically, Dance.

Last week was their first lesson. They had to choose their partners for the next three weeks. Mike and Will were among the six boys who dawdled too long to choose a partner; so they’re partners now.

It’d be bad enough having to dance with Mike, but it’s going to be even worse now he’s not here. He’ll probably have to dance with *Mr Garcia*. Will considers skipping, but he’s not like Mike. He can’t stand the thought of getting in trouble.

His hand is on the changing room door when he hears a shout.

‘Will.’ Mike thunders down the hallway, sneakers slapping the lino.

Will stares. Mike’s hair is filled with leaves and twigs, and his arms are all scratched. He looks like the inspiration for the phrase ‘dragged through a hedge backwards.’

‘Do I, uh, do I look all right?’

‘No.’ Will points out all the places Mike does not look all right. Mike frantically brushes them down. ‘I didn’t think you were coming to school today.’

‘Well,’ says Mike, ‘I wasn’t going to, but then I remembered. Um.’ He gestures awkwardly at the dancing couples.

He didn’t want to leave Will on his own. Typical Mike and his white-knight complex.

‘Shall we?’ Mike adds, and before Will can answer he bursts in a

clumsy tangle of limbs through the doors. Will follows reluctantly and they take their place at the edge of the dancing couples. Mr Garcia shoots a glare at them, but doesn't say anything.

'You're, like, almost my height now,' Mike babbles, while Will looks around to work out what they're supposed to be doing. 'When did that happen?'

'Dunno,' says Will, distracted. 'Who should lead?'

'You can,' Mike says. 'You're the better dancer.'

Will can't really deny it, because at the Snow Ball Mike took down an entire wall of tinsel curtains. He quickly drops his gaze and puts a hand on Mike's waist. Mike's hand drifts up to rest on Will's shoulder; Will determinedly keeps looking down. He reaches for Mike's free hand, feels Mike's fingers interlace with his own.

They are terrible dance partners. Will can't find the rhythm to save himself. Once Mike trips Will up, and another time he whacks him in the eye.

Everyone else looks either desperately bored or like they're actually getting the hang of it. Several times Max and Lucas sashay past them, sniggering, looking unfairly elegant.

Will and Mike are a tangled, demonic mess and every few seconds they keep stopping and having to look away so they don't burst into laughter. Mike's very flushed now, and Will is sure his own face is bright red.

Mr Garcia shouts, 'Will! Mike! Less tangle, more tango.'

Unfortunately, this is the moment when a slower dance comes on.

'Arms right around the waists, now, don't be shy,' Mr Garcia calls. 'To create true art, we must abandon all self-consciousness.'

Mike's staring right at him, eyes huge. He looks faintly shell-shocked. Will gives him a nervous smile, but it doesn't seem to help.

Who knows, maybe Mike's having flashbacks to getting dragged

backwards through a hedge.

After thinking that, Will notices a stray leaf Mike's hair. He reaches up to take it out. Mike flinches rapidly away, eyes going wider still.

Will shows him the leaf.

'You okay?' Will mutters, and Mike nods too quickly.

Then he shifts a little closer, hand running down Will's back.

Will's heart feels like it's going to burst out of his chest. He looks down, so he doesn't see Mike leaning over, and startles violently when Mike's sleek hair brushes his cheek.

Mike's lips brush Will's ear:

'I think I found a lead today. For my research.'

Will leans up to whisper back. 'You ever going to tell me what it is you're researching?'

'Course,' says Mike, straightening, his smile spilling sunlight into the room. 'But not 'til I find what I'm looking for.'

*

Summer slouches around. The mornings shrill with wild birdsong and the hum of insects.

Hopper finally says that he'll let Jane outside with them over summer, provided she's in disguise and they keep away from public spaces. They're planning to fly kites on her first day out. Jane's super excited, because she's watched *Mary Poppins* like six billion times already.

The first week of vacation, they try to build a raft to go out on Randolph Lake. But the first raft sinks instantly, and the second one disintegrates. Mike and Dustin get all the way out to the middle of the lake on the third one before it breaks loudly in half.

They give up, and pool their money to buy a fishing line and a tub of

maggots.

Max rigs the line up on a tree branch, so they can play cards while they wait. It's lucky she did, because they go two and a half days without catching anything.

On the third day, Dustin turns up with a bewildered-looking Steve, announcing,

'There's wild jocks in this forest.'

Steve is a valuable find, because he knows *a lot* of card games. He teaches them Gin Rummy and Hearts and President. Will is just one hand away from being President when the fishing line starts to jerk wildly.

They all shout; Max runs over, yanks hard on the line, then calls:

'Got it!'

She starts reeling in the line. Steve scrambles up and hovers behind her with his hands spread wide, like he thinks she's going to pull up a demogorgon.

Finally, out of the water flaps a fish about the size of Max's thumb. Everyone groans.

'I'm going to fry it,' Max announces gleefully, as it wriggles around in her clasped hands.

'But it's just a baby,' says Lucas. Max rolls her eyes at him. Lucas' eyes go all big, and Max sighs, tossing the tiny fish over her shoulder into the water. When she sits down, he kisses her cheek.

They finish the round. Will finally gets to be President. Steve is Scum for the fourth time in a row: everyone cheers and slaps him on the back.

They play on until they've eaten all of Dustin's snacks and drunk all the soda and juice. The line hasn't moved again once: Will exchanges a relieved look with Lucas.

That first week is so fun – even though Mike mysteriously disappears for two days, citing ‘research’ – which is why it’s so unfair that on Saturday, when Mike’s back and they’re all going out to pick blackberries, Will finds himself gasping on the forest floor.

The Shadow-Monster is crawling through him. He can feel acid rising in his throat, he’s either going to pass out or puke and he doesn’t know which –

I need Mom – Jonathan –

They’re all gone, everyone’s gone, it’s dark –

– it’s all in his head – he can see the red-gold of the pine needles beneath his feet –

I need –

‘Mike?’ he gasps out, feeling pathetic.

Don’t freak out. Breathe.

Don’t freak-freak-freak-freak-freak-freak–

‘Will.’

Mike’s crouched in front of him, looking lost.

‘Will? What’s wrong? Is it an episode –’ Will shakes his head. ‘It’s a panic attack, right?’

Mike makes like he’s going to reach out and grip Will’s shoulders, then stops and folds his hands over his knees, which is a relief because it feels like there’s almost no space left in the world –

‘Breathe. It’s okay.’ Mike’s voice sounds steadier than before.

He finds Mike’s eyes – they’re wide with concern, but somehow calm. As if Mike knows everything’s going to be all right. How can he know that?

Will can make out every single freckle dusting Mike’s cheeks.

‘That’s better,’ Mike says, reaching up to lightly stroke Will’s hair back from his forehead. Will flinches a little, and Mike makes a soothing noise. ‘S’just me.’

Despite everything, Will’s skin still sparkles with electricity under Mike’s fingertips.

Mike gently reaches for Will’s sweaty hand, puts it on his own chest. Will jolts violently. He can feel the warmth of Mike’s skin through his thin t-shirt.

‘Breathe with me, okay?’

Mike inhales slowly and his chest rises beneath Will’s palm; Will tries.

‘I can’t,’ he gasps.

‘It’s okay,’ Mike says, smiling faintly. ‘I got you.’

And he stays there, holding Will’s hand to his chest in the dappled late-afternoon light, while the trees shimmer bright green and gold behind him, ‘til Will’s breathing evens out. The others are long gone; he can’t even hear an echo of them. It’s just the two of them.

Mike uncertainly holds his arms out, ‘Hug?’

Will nods and curls against Mike’s chest. Unexpectedly, he feels Mike’s fingers stroking over his hair.

Will can’t help it – it’s all too much – he sobs into Mike’s t-shirt. He’s ruined a lot of shirts this year.

‘Sorry,’ he says, pulling away.

‘Don’t be sorry.’

‘We should go find the others.’

‘Or – we could go back to your place.’

Will nods shakily. He doesn’t want the others to see him all trembly

and pale and tear-stained. Mike walkie-talkies to let them know.

Dustin swears at them both a lot, 'til Mike explains this means they'll get more blackberries between them, and he cheers up instantly.

'I'm still working on that present,' Mike tells Will as he helps him to his feet.

'You really don't need to,' Will says uncomfortably.

'It's not going well. By the time I get it done it'll probably be your Christmas present. 'Although, who knows,' he adds cryptically. 'I have a good feeling about Midsummer's Day.'

'Huh?' says Will.

Mike just pretends to lock his mouth, and grins.

*

By late June, the days are heavy with heat. Dustin and Lucas and Max are all away on family trips – Dustin's in Canada, but Lucas is in *Spain*. Jane's at her mom and aunt's for a couple weeks.

Mike's still here. Will's avoiding him. Without school, Will's getting worse, not better. All he wants to do is lie down and not move. Mom lets him, but she worries.

He doesn't want Mike to see him like this.

Will's lying in bed on one of the afternoons that blur into one another, eyes half-closed, when his walkie-talkie crackles into life.

'Will,' Nancy's voice comes breathlessly over the walkie-talkie. 'Will, are you there?'

He lunges for it.

'Hello?'

'Have you seen Mike?'

'No,' Will says, sitting bolt upright, panic splintering icily through his

veins. 'Is he missing?'

'No, it's fine,' Nancy says, in a voice that means it's definitely not fine, and cuts out.

A moment later, the phone rings. Will runs to get it, because Mom's at work, and also because he knows who it'll be.

'Ohh, heyy, Will,' says Nancy, very awkwardly. 'I – um. Is your brother there?'

Will wordlessly brings the phone into Jonathan's room, and waits until the brief, anxious conversation finishes before demanding Jonathan tell him everything.

Jonathan always tells Will the whole truth. Will loves that about him.

'Don't freak out, but Mike's been gone all day. He's missed lunch and dinner,' Jonathan says. 'His parents don't know – Nancy's been covering for him.'

Jonathan starts saying he thinks he should go to the Wheelers' alone, but then he sees the look in Will's eyes.

'Okay, you can come,' he says hastily, then his lip quirks. 'But you should probably lose the dinosaur pyjamas.'

Mr Wheeler lets them in with his head still twisted to look at the T.V. His eyes flicker towards them. He half-heartedly calls, 'Mike! Nancy!' up the stairs and plods back over to the couch, crashing down onto it.

Nancy is waiting for them in the hall, clutching Mike's walkie-talkie. She gestures into her room and shuts the door behind them. They sit side-by-side on her bed.

'It's my fault,' she says desperately, striding up and down the room, gnawing on her bitten-to-the-quick nails. 'Mike got super obsessed with magical creatures – so I got hold of Murray Bauman again–'

Will remembers that long-ago conversation with Mike about dragons and fairies.

‘Bauman? Really?’ Jonathan interjects. She nods dismissively. ‘How’d you convince him?’

‘I’m persuasive,’ says Nancy with a dangerous glimmer in her eyes. Will has a sudden memory of the Wheeler-Byers Laser Tag game. Jonathan, Mike and Will were all pretty useless; Nancy was like the Terminator. ‘Bauman photocopied all this research he’s done, on, like, centaurs and witches, and I gave it to Mike–’ Nancy’s voice is getting higher and faster and tighter as she speaks. ‘He’s been so down lately, I thought, maybe it’d cheer him up to have a project, but now I can’t believe how stupid I was, what if–’

She stops abruptly. Her eyes flick to Will and away.

‘We could ask Jane,’ Will tells them, standing up.

‘I already called her,’ Nancy says, trembling a little. Jonathan stands too, and wraps his arms around her. She doesn’t look particularly like she wants to be hugged, though; the trembling isn’t maiden-in-distress trembling, it’s I’m-going-to-kill-something trembling. If Will was Jonathan he’d take a big step back. ‘She says she’s sure he’s alive, but she can’t find him. She can usually find people anywhere, even in the Upside Down; what does that *mean*?’

Jonathan squeezes her comfortingly. ‘Maybe her powers are just getting weaker, or something.’

‘Or maybe – some *thing*’s blocking her powers. If we can’t find him by tonight, she and Hopper are coming back to help us.’

Will refuses to believe any of this. Mike isn’t stupid enough to get himself lost. He stands up. He knows all of Mike’s secret hiding places in this house; maybe there’s more information somewhere.

‘Can I look in his room?’

‘Sure,’ Nancy says, and makes to lead him there.

‘Uh, sorry, but is it okay if I go in alone?’

Nancy lifts her hands up helplessly. ‘Go ahead.’

Will shuts Mike's bedroom door behind him. He looks around at the maths trophies gleaming on the dresser; the tangled ball of bedclothes on the bed; the Dark Crystal poster, peeling down on one corner. The room smells like Mike, and it's so dumb but it makes him feel safe, like he could curl up in here and fall asleep and have no bad dreams at all.

There's nothing under the loose floorboard or inside the hollow bottom of the desk lamp. Will quietly goes over to Mike's dresser. There's a mirror set in the wood of the dresser door; Will carefully uses his fingernails to pry it back. A thin composition book and several sheets of paper fall to the floor. Will replaces the mirror and picks everything up.

The sheets of paper must be some of the photocopies from the guy Nancy was talking about; there's one titled *Centaurs*, one *Dragons* and one *Fey*. Will sets them on the bed and flips through the exercise book. On each page is a different heading, in Mike's crabbed, kind of drunk-looking handwriting: *Mermaids. Fairies. Elves. Nymphs. Genies.*

Beneath each heading are glued-in news-paper clippings and photocopied textbook paragraphs. He must have been working on this for weeks. Will flicks through for some kind of – of schedule, or map, or something, some clue of where Mike might be. But there's nothing.

He turns the book over to look at the cover again. Mike has scrawled:

Operation Magic for Will.

Will's heart jolts like someone's yanked it. At the same moment, there's an impatient knock on the door.

'Can we come in yet?' says Nancy.

Will opens the door, passes them the book and the papers.

They all sit on Mike's bed, Nancy in the middle, with the book opened on her lap.

'Such a nerd,' she says fondly, tracing her hand over Mike's scratchy diagram of a sphinx.

‘Wait,’ says Will, leaning over to put his finger on the opposite page. *Elves*. He’s glimpsed the words *Midsummer’s Day*, and it’s pulled back a memory of Mike chattering away in a sunlit forest. ‘When’s Midsummer’s Day?’

‘24th of June,’ says Jonathan instantly. ‘That’s today, right?’

Nancy hunches over and reads:

‘*Huldufólk*, or hidden people, are elves or fairies in Icelandic and Faroese folklore. Building projects in are sometimes altered to prevent damaging the rocks where they are believed to live. They are known to fear churches and electricity. There are four holidays considered to have a special connection with hidden people: Christmas night, New Year’s Eve, *Brettándinn* , and Midsummer Night.’

Jonathan’s finger jabs urgently at a lower paragraph, and Nancy reads frantically:

‘On Midsummer Night, folklore states that if you sit at a crossroads, elves will appear; they have been known to give great rewards to humans they deem worthy, but have lured countless others to their doom.’ She breaks off. ‘God. He’s such a *goddamn idiot!*’

Jonathan stands. ‘Let’s check all the crossroads.’

Will takes the book off Nancy’s lap. ‘It says they only appear before children and lone travellers.’

‘Kids and people on their own?’ spits Nancy. ‘Sounds an awful lot like a demogorgon.’

She’s trembling, her knuckles white.

Jonathan puts a gentle hand on her shoulder, but she doesn’t relax. Her eyes are fixed out the window: on the steadily sinking sun. In an hour or so it’ll be set. Midsummer Night, Will thinks. If it is the hidden people that found Mike, there’s still time.

Children and lone travellers.

‘Jane says the Upside Down can’t reach us now,’ Will tells Nancy firmly.

‘She’s just a kid,’ says Nancy.

‘She’s more than a kid,’ says Jonathan, and they start to argue in tight voices. They’re wasting time; but if Mike’s book is right, neither of them will be any help to Will anyway. And if he tries to tell them his plan, they’ll never let him go through with it.

Nancy and Jonathan’s voices are rising, raw and rough and desperate.

‘Just going to the bathroom,’ says Will quietly. He goes out into the hall, closing Mike’s bedroom door behind him, and breaks into a run.

*

Will races against the fading light. He’s heading for the Elm and Mulberry Street intersection: he doesn’t really know why he’s chosen it, apart from that it’s secluded and surrounded by birch trees and no one ever goes there. He just has this feeling that it’s the one Mike would’ve gone for.

Look. This is what he’ll do: wait for the hidden folk to appear, resist all their temptations, and make them give him Mike.

He walks back and forwards underneath the road-sign. The back of his neck is cold with sweat.

I’m safe.

Over twenty minutes pass. Will starts to feel better; sort of warm and cosy and sleepy, like when he was a kid and Mom tucked him up in bed.

Actually, he’s *really* sleepy.

He curls up in the grass and rests his head on his arms like a pillow.

‘Will Byers,’ says a melodic voice, and Will’s eyes flutter open.

The sun is turning the sky a brilliant orange-purple. Standing before

him is a slender, silvery creature with enormous grey eyes.

He can't quite tell if it's a woman, or a man, or neither, but it's definitely not human. Will scrambles to his feet.

'Where's Mike?' he asks, trying to keep his voice calm.

The creature laughs, reaching out to touch Will's temple with their pointy fingers. He jerks away nervously.

'Ah,' they say, and their voice sounds like it has several other voices inside it. 'You must be the Prince.'

'What?' says Will angrily. 'Do you have Mike Wheeler? Tell me.'

'I don't have Mike Wheeler,' they say, 'but he is in our world, imprisoned in stone.' They examine their fingers. 'I could take you there if that is your desire.'

Will nods frantically, and the silvery creature waves a hand. A glowing spot, like a star, appears among the birches. As Will watches, the star grows into a glowing ring, which grows bigger and bigger, until it becomes a window.

Through it, Will can see darkness. Another world.

He feels familiar cold stab through his gut. Memories of the Upside Down rise up to choke him.

He can't go in there.

He's so stupid. He should've at least told Jonathan where he was going.

'What is that place?' Will says. 'What are you?'

'Through that portal is my own world. Its true nature, and that of our race, is somewhat beyond human comprehension: you interpret us in ways you can understand. Some humans know us as elves or nymphs, although I've always liked *fairies*.'

'Why did you take Mike?' he shouts, and they laugh with a thousand

laughs.

‘Easily. He practically offered himself up, and we do love to play with humans.’ Will hates the way they say that. ‘Now that you have arrived, the game can start.’

The fairy opens their palm and a clear object appears. At first glance it looks like a glass bubble, tightly belted in the middle with a ring of silver. Will sees the top half is filled with silvery powder. It’s trickling in a stream into the bottom.

It’s an hourglass.

‘Here is our game, Will Byers. Find Mike Wheeler and wake him before the time runs out, and you may retrieve him. Otherwise, he will be lost to you for good.’

‘No, I – I don’t accept,’ Will says desperately, but already the window to the other world is shrinking, the glowing ring getting smaller and smaller. ‘I don’t want to play your stupid game! Just give him back!’

‘Go now, Will Byers, or lose Mike Wheeler forever,’ the fairy says, laughing, and with an elegant bound they disappear through the glowing circle.

‘No,’ Will screams. He runs up to the circle, then stops.

He can’t go in there.

But Mike’s in there.

Will takes a huge breath and dives through the circle just before it closes.

He lands hard on his knees; they sting as he gets to his feet. He’s surrounded by pure black.

There’s no point telling himself he’s safe now. He never really believed it anyway.

He turns around, and *there*. A little burst of light bouncing around a sharp corner, faintly illuminating sloping dirt walls. Will must be in

some kind of cave.

He breaks into a run.

He's running for a long time. Every time he turns a corner, there's yet another corner ahead.

Then, suddenly, he sees the exit. Beyond the cave, it's colourful like nothing he's ever seen before: rolling green hills, a vibrant sky. Trees with huge, jewel-like leaves, swaying oddly as though they are underwater.

This place, whatever it is, is no Upside Down.

Will speeds up.

He's two feet from freedom when he trips and goes flying.

He scrambles to his feet to see black scales, coils upon coils: some living, breathing *thing*, like a snake except far too big. Then he sees the thin, leathery, folded wings, the smoke spilling out of a nostril, and he stumbles backwards on unsteady legs.

He runs. Bursts out of the mouth of the cave, then turns back: there's no movement in the dark of the cave. He thinks, hopes, it's still sleeping.

Will imagines telling Mike he saw a *dragon*.

In the the distance is a tangled, dark forest, wilder and more massive than any forest he's ever seen. Will looks around. To the left there is a huge, squat stone building, surrounded by a moat. A temple? Or maybe – a tomb. It has a vast wooden door, tightly barred.

Will pulls the hourglass out of his backpack. The sparkling, silvery dust is already about a fifth gone. His heart, only just beginning to slow down, jolts back into speed.

There is a rickety bridge leading over the moat to the tomb-thing: Will sprints jerkily over it.

But – no matter how hard he pushes and hurls himself against the

door, no matter how hard he screams and scratches and bruises his fists from pummelling – the goddamn door won't budge.

'Mike,' he screams, his voice ragged, thumping on the door and sinking to his knees.

Then he stops. He turns to look at the pitch-black cave. He has an idea.

*

It's Jessica Hastings' twelfth birthday party, and Will is pretending to be absorbed in pouring himself a cup of lemonade, but he's really watching Mike. Who is sitting with his too-long legs awkwardly folded under him, ducking his head so his dark hair tumbles into his eyes, surrounded by a group of giggling girls.

Jessica's irritatingly pretty friend, Lucia Almas, was the one who asked Mike to play Spin the Bottle. Will is sure she has a thing for Mike, who shrugged helplessly at Will as Lucia took his hand and dragged him over.

Another wave of giggles rises up from the Spin the Bottle group. Will glumly wanders out into the hall, where James Brooker is waiting.

'Ew, what are you creeping around for, Byers?' James says, and then says the one horrible word he always saves just for Will, the one that made Mom ring up the principal when she found out.

'Leave me alone,' Will says quietly, trying to push past him.

'Ew,' said James, raising his voice. 'Byers is rubbing his dick on me.'

Will feels his eyes growing hot. He ducks underneath James, runs down the hall. He makes it into the bathroom and locks it just before he hears James slam into the door.

'Hey, Byers, let me in! I'll give you a blowie.'

Will doesn't know what that word means.

James keeps slamming against the door, bang, bang, bang. Will draws his knees to his chest and covers his ears with his hands. He waits till it's

finally silent before he lets himself cry, muffling the sound into his knees.

'Will?' he hears a soft voice say. 'You in there?'

He unlocks the door to find Mike. He looks flushed and happy and a little giddy. He has a smear of neon pink lipstick on his bottom lip. Will wonders who he kissed.

Mike brushes Will's cheek with the back of his hand, and frowns. Will can see his tears glittering on Mike's knuckle.

'It's nothing,' says Will.

'It was James, wasn't it?' says Mike, his voice shaking with anger. 'That asshole.'

'It doesn't matter,' says Will, kind of desperately.

When they go through the door into the living room, Mike's hand is still resting on Will's back, and all he can think about is how James will see, how everyone will see.

Sure enough, James yells that word again, only now it's at Mike, too. All of the girls in the corner giggle except for Lucia Almas. The strong and irrational dislike Will's been feeling towards Lucia this evening melts a little.

On his back, he feels Mike's hand clench to a fist. Mike's so angry Will can feel it radiating out of him.

'Let's go,' Mike bites out. He storms to the door, with Will behind him, but then James yells something foul one more time, followed by an awful chorus of giggles.

Mike stops. Will silently begs him to just leave it alone. But Mike isn't good at that.

'You know what?' Mike says loudly. 'Fuck all of you. I'm glad you're not my friends.'

He slams the door violently behind them. The night air is shockingly cold.

'You didn't have to do that,' Will says quietly.

Mike frowns, like that's a weird thing to say. 'Yes, I did.'

*

Will awkwardly pokes the sleeping dragon's eye with the tree branch.

'Hey,' he says. Nothing.

He's dripping water all over the dragon's head, because he jumped in the moat in the hopes it would protect him from burning.

Come on, Byers.

'Hey,' Will shouts, and gives the dragon's body an almighty shove: a whole sleek coil of its tail slides onto the ground.

Its yellow eyes snap open. Will stumbles backwards as flames explode out of its nostrils.

He sprints rapidly out of the tunnel. He hears the slithering, gravelly sound of the creature's body unlooping; and then a bone-chilling roar.

It flames at him twice; he somehow manages to dodge it both times. He's *so close* to the tomb when the dragon flames a third time. But not close enough.

Will feels heat bloom over his back. His wet clothes protect most of him, but his right hand sears with pain.

He leaps over the precipice, straight down into the moat. Cool washes blissfully over his burning hand as he plummets to the bottom. Once he's on the moat floor, he swims rapidly around the back of the tomb, hoping the dragon can't see where he's gone.

He surfaces – it's worked – there's no sign of the dragon. He scrambles awkwardly up the rocky cliff of the island that bears the tomb, sprints around to the doors. The dragon is nowhere to be seen.

Will squares his shoulders, thinks of Mike, and screams: 'Come on,

then.'

He hears the dragon's intake of breath; it's closer than he thought – just around the corner of the tomb. He hears it slither towards him. Every one of his instincts tells him to jump. But he waits.

He sees the yellow of its eyes appear around the corner, watches its nostrils flare, and – *now*.

Will flings himself down just as the flames appear; he feels the heat blast over him, but no pain, before he drops mercifully into the deep.

He swims around the back again – the same trick as before. He's sure that yellow, beady eye will be there when he surfaces. But – nothing. He's tricked it again, somehow. Will scrambles up onto the island and tiptoes around to the tomb door.

The flames have left a charred hole in the corner of the door. Big enough for him to crawl through.

When he's inside, in the musty darkness, he punches the air, just a little. It smells dead in here.

'Mike,' he says desperately, but there is no answer but own echoing voice.

Will's eyes adjust, and he notices there is a sort of stone altar at the far end on the temple. Atop lies a still figure.

'Mike,' he calls, and runs towards it, his footsteps making dust from the tomb ceiling shudder over him.

When he sees what's on the altar, he falls back, sickened.

It's a skeleton. In a golden crown, holding a silver sword. It's not Mike; whoever it was, it was adult once. Will stares helplessly at the hollows in the skull where the eyes should be. He's finding it hard to breathe; the air feels thick and dry with dust.

The dragon explodes through the doors.

Will dives behind the altar as fire illuminates the tomb.

He curls into a ball. *Don't get me.*

But the rules here aren't the same as the Upside Down – there's more choices than just run and hide.

The sword.

Will lunges up to grab for the sword; but it's so heavy. He gives a mighty tug. It scrapes hideously out of the skeleton's bony grip, and clatters violently to the floor.

The yellow, bulbous eyes of the dragon swivel towards him.

Its pupils snap into slits.

Will looks at the skeleton and thinks: *I will not let that happen to Mike.*

All his muscles scream, but he manages to raise the sword a little.

He swears the dragon snorts in amusement. It inhales –

Will, muscles trembling like he's about to collapse, lifts the sword a little higher.

I will not let –

Suddenly, the blade gleams with some supernatural glow. It grows air-light, and Will raises it easily over his head; the entire tomb becomes radiant, and the dragon hisses and cowers.

Will lunges at the dragon: it screams and slithers backwards, the blade-tip just nicking its skin. Will chases it out of the tomb and watches it flap into the sky.

Hey, fighting back feels *good*. He gets what Mike was talking about.

Mike. He drops the sword with a clang and takes out his hourglass. A third of the silver dust is gone.

The sword's gone heavy again; it'll be hard to run with. Will runs back to the altar and, holding his breath, unbuckles the scabbard that's encircling the skeleton's spine. It's way too big to sit around his

waist like it's supposed to, so he awkwardly hangs it over his shoulder, and with effort slides the sword into the sheath.

Will walks out of the tomb, looks up at that enormous, dark, tangled forest, seeming to move and breathe like it was straight from the Upside Down.

The fairy said it was a test, right? If someone truly wanted to test Will, where would they put the thing he was searching for? Behind the thing that scared him most.

He heads for the forest.

*

Go Home Stay Home is fun until Will, running too fast, trips over a tree root and lands weird on his ankle.

He tries not to make a sound, but Mike, who is currently concealed up one of the trees, instantly calls, 'Will?'

'I'm fine,' Will tries, but he sees first one, then both, of Mike's white sneakers swing down from the tree branch.

Jai Murphy's counting in the distance – '23, 22, 21–'

'Stay up there or you'll get caught,' Will yells at him, but it's useless. Mike drops to the ground. Then he's beside Will, his pale face twisted with concern.

'Where does it hurt?'

'Just my ankle. It's fine,' Will says again, trying to stand up and failing miserably.

Mike grabs him before he can collapse. 'I got you. Hey, lean on me, okay? Let's go back to my house.'

Jai comes thundering up to them and grabs them both hard by the wrists.

'Gotcha,' he shouts in their faces.

'We're not playing,' Mike says.

'Cheats,' Jai says, kicking dust at them, and hurtles away.

Will can't even seem to put a little weight on his foot. He feels weak. Two kids make a desperate sprint past them towards home, laughing hysterically. It's starting to get dark now; a few flashlights are switching on, gleaming like stars through the trees.

'I don't know if I can walk,' Will says.

'I'll carry you, then,' says Mike cheerfully.

'No,' Will protests.

'What's the matter?'

Will's doesn't need Mike to treat him like a – princess.

'I don't know, it's just weird if you carry me.'

'You got a better idea?' demands Mike, and Will doesn't, really, and his ankle's starting to throb. He won't let himself cry.

'Fine, you can try,' he says finally. 'But I'll probably be too heavy.'

Mike hooks one hand under his arm and the other behind knees, and easily scoops Will up.

'I feel like we just got married,' he says, giggling. Will rolls his eyes.

But Mike insists on kicking the Wheelers' front door open and carrying Will all the way up to his bed like they really are newlyweds. Will tells him what a dork he is but it doesn't stop him.

Mike makes Will an ice pack with frozen peas and tea-towels and carefully duct tapes it over the swollen bruise on Will's ankle. They spend a few hours coming up with D&D campaign ideas; despite the dull, constant pain, it's actually a pretty nice night.

With every step, the sword thwacks loudly and painfully against

Will's chest. He stops to adjust it for the fifth time, and as he's catching his breath, he notices something small and white on the ground.

It's Mike's shoe. One of his favourite, old, worn sneakers with the black stripes.

Will picks the shoe up, shivering. Why would he have lost his shoe and not come back for it?

He imagines Mike running, stumbling, falling to his knees, sobbing as *something* hurtles towards him.

God, stop it, he thinks furiously at his imagination.

The forest is looming in front of him, dark and ominous.

Suddenly, from somewhere in the trees, there comes a murderous growl. He fumbles for his sword, backs clumsily away with his hands wrapped around the hilt. But nothing appears from the darkness.

Will's about to run when he hears something else. Something whimpering. It's not Mike; it sounds like an animal, a calf or goat or something. He knows he should leave it – but the sound is so desperate.

He stumbles into the forest, and finds the source of the sound almost instantly.

Before him is a huge, emaciated wolf, with green, glowing eyes. It has a pale golden fawn by the leg, and is shaking her violently while she cries.

Will feels a shock so strong it vibrates through his skull.

Later he'll realise it's because he's *been* that fawn. Now he just thinks: *save her*.

He reaches for the sword; it is impossibly heavy again as he draws it out.

Will's arms shake even more violently than before, but he knows now

he can do it, and it doesn't take long for him to lift it above his waist. He lurches awkwardly over to the wolf, arms trembling violently under the sword's weight. He could almost laugh at how un-heroic he must look right now.

The wolf sees him and snarls, dropping its prey. He doesn't know the best place to aim; he desperately brings the blade down on its neck.

But the sword twists, lands flat on the wolf's neck and bounces off. Before Will can think it's leaping at him, bloody teeth gleaming scarlet and yellow.

He ducks, but the wolf is atop him, claws digging through his t-shirt, teeth gleaming as its jaws open for his neck. Will screams, and *something* huge crashes into the wolf.

Will scrambles away backwards on his hands and feet, watches as a titanic golden stag crushes wolf with its antlers against a tree.

The wolf falls in a bloody heap to the ground. It doesn't move. Will thinks it might be dead.

The stag and the fawn both look at Will, gleaming in the dark, bodies trembling and alert. The little fawn is bleeding badly, but it manages to stumble to its feet with the bigger deer's help. Will lowers his sword.

'I'm not going to hurt you,' he says slowly, but he doesn't think they understand. In a flurry, they hurtle away, their gleam illuminating a faint dirt path through the trees. Will sort of wants to follow them, but he doesn't know if that's the right way.

He looks at his hourglass. One third of the sparkling dust remains. Well, he doesn't really have much time to work out what the right way is any more. He has to take his chances.

He sprints after them.

*

'Will?' Mike says through the dark.

'Yeah?'

'Who do you like?'

'Huh?' Will says.

His heart's like crashing thunder in Mike's quiet basement.

'You know. Like like.'

'Oh,' stammers Will, pleading with his heart to quiet down. 'I – don't know. Who do you like?'

Mike sighs. 'I like... Jessica. And Hansane, and – so many people. Sometimes I think I just get a crush on anyone who smiles at me.'

'That sounds exhausting,' says Will honestly. His one crush usually feels like too much.

'It's not so bad,' Mike says. 'When I'm bored in History I just daydream about my billions of crushes.'

Will's curious.

'What stuff do you daydream about?'

'This is gonna sound dumb, but usually holding hands.'

'Just that?'

'Pretty much. I just really like the idea of holding hands with someone you like,' Mike says.

Will's breath catches in his throat. Not now, don't think about that, not when he's so close–

Mike says, soberly, 'Nancy says I like everyone because I'm ultra-hormonal.'

Will snorts.

'Crap,' Mike says. 'Please don't tell Dustin and Lucas I told you that or my nickname's gonna be Ultra-Hormonal for the rest of eternity.'

'I won't. Promise.'

'Seriously, don't you like anyone at all?' Mike needles. 'Ohh, do you have like, a weird crush? Oh man – do you like Ms Ross?'

'Ew, no!' Will squeals. 'No, I just don't – like anyone.'

About five minutes pass, and neither of them say anything at all.

Will's about to cough and say good night when Mike's hand fumbles over his own. Will freezes. But he's sure it's an accident.

Then Mike's fingers tangle with his. His hand's so warm; Will's hand must feel like ice to him.

Will's whole body feels electrified. It's almost not a nice feeling. Too much, like he's about to burn or short-circuit.

Tremblingly, he curls his own fingers lightly around Mike's.

Mike squeezes his hand tight for a second, keeps their palms pressed together. Will's heart is slamming violently against his ribcage.

Then, as suddenly as before, Mike takes his hand away.

'Sorry,' he says laughing. 'I dunno why I did that.'

'That's okay,' Will says, just managing to laugh too.

The dust is trickling steadily to an end, and Will is only a dozen steps into the forest. The path has disappeared; he can see a grey glimmer, that might be stone, far in the distance. But to get to it, he has to walk straight into the dark.

He closes his eyes for a second. He can feel all the signs, the racing heart, the quickening breath.

There's no time to panic. There's *no time*. But knowing that doesn't help.

Will squeezes his eyes even tighter closed and does something he's

never let himself do before.

He imagines that Mike is in front of him, back on that green-and-yellow midsummer day, holding Will's hand to his own chest.

It's not much air, but it's enough.

Fuck this forest. He won't let it defeat him. He raises the sword, swings wildly, slashing at vines and slicing clean through slender trunks. Not fast enough, though.

He slashes harder, more violently. The forest seems to be growing darker – is he imagining it? Or is it moving inwards? As he hesitates mid-swing, a vine curls around his arm.

Then vines are everywhere, snaking up his ankles and wrapping around his chest. One twists around the hilt of his sword, and yanks it violently away.

All he can think of is tunnels, vines, *killkillkillkillkill* –

Will desperately turns and sinks his teeth into the vine around his wrist, shakes his head like a dog with a chew toy. Feels it snap in two; tries to reach down for the sword on the ground.

He can't get low enough. He tries again; the vines tighten a little further around his chest.

For just a second, he lets himself give in to despair. The time's almost run out. He's ruined everything; he couldn't save Mike.

He has strangest feeling that someone he knows is here, just around the corner. 'Bob?' he says stupidly. He sees a red flutter of wings, and then a tiny bird with a bright red chest flies right into his face.

'Argh,' says Will, closing his eyes. The bird perches on his shoulder and lets out a loud stream of angry chirruping.

Will smiles a bit despite his dire circumstances. He feels strangely comforted.

'Hey, I'm doing the best I can, all right?'

He tries to reach the sword again and fails. Now the bird's tweeting louder and louder, like it's reproaching him.

'Hey, I didn't start it,' Will says defensively, and the bird flutters right in his face. 'Argh,' says Will, turning his head away. 'Okay. I'm... sorry, forest. Does that make you happy?' he asks the bird. But apparently it doesn't. The bird's still tweeting in his face.

He hears the distinct sound of hooves, and looks up to see glimmer of silver through the trees.

And a unicorn thunders into the clearing, followed by a huge, dark stag with a streak of blood on its face.

Will giggles, feeling a little delirious. 'Who do you guys think I am, Snow White?'

Looks like being squeezed to death by a forest and rapidly losing any chance of saving Mike is giving him a sense of humor.

The stag comes up to bump its nose against Will's face. 'Hey again,' he says softly.

The unicorn gently bows to touch Will's shoulder with its gleaming horn. He feels a kind of warm sparkle tingle through him, not unlike how he feels whenever Mike touches him.

Slowly, it gets easier to breathe. And he realises the vines are retreating.

Will quickly shakes himself free, and kicks the ground a bit to get the pins and needles out of his legs. 'Thank you,' he says fervently.

He has the weird feeling that it was the stag, and maybe the little bird too, that fetched the unicorn. The unicorn gives off a very important air, kind of like a king. Or a Jedi Knight. He feels shy in its presence.

The little bird is chirping with hysterical excitement. The unicorn kneels right down and kind of impatiently jerks its head at Will.

Will quickly takes the hourglass out of his pocket, and sees there is

still time. Not much. But maybe just enough. He picks up his sword and sheathes it, then clambers awkwardly onto the unicorn's back. The feel of its mane reminds Will of flowing water. He has to wrap it several times around his hands to get a proper grip.

'All right,' he says.

The unicorn breaks into a gallop, and Will only just manages not to fall off. The stag is sprinting alongside them, the tiny bird somehow managing to keep up too, bobbing wildly beside Will's head.

The forest is changing around them. Little buds are appearing, and glossy leaves; and then he sees the roses. Pink and red and white.

A few more gallops, and the whole forest is roses. Enormous, heavy, sweetly scented roses, carpeting the ground with their bright petals. They seem to lean down and brush gently against Will's head and shoulders.

And up ahead – he can see it. A vast wall of stone. Only it's not a tomb. It's far too big for that.

It must be a castle.

*

'Will,' Mike says, standing in the door to the Byers' living room. Tears spill down his cheeks. 'You're back.'

Mike didn't used to cry much. Before.

'It's okay,' Will says gently, standing so he can walk over to him, but Mike's too fast. He flies at Will and hugs him so tight he feels like he's being crushed.

Will doesn't mind being crushed by Mike. Being in his arms is so different from the cold, inescapable presence of the Shadow Monster that Will almost starts crying too.

'Will's still very tired, sweetie,' Mom tells Mike.

That's true enough. Will felt impossibly exhausted from the minute he

came back to himself last night in Hopper's shed. He almost fell asleep in Mom's arms straight away.

But for some reason, when he was actually home and in Mom's bed, he couldn't sleep at all.

'I'm fine,, Mom,' Will lies, and asks Mike: 'Wanna hang out in my room for a bit?'

Mike sits on Will's messy bed and reaches for his hand. Will takes it as he sits beside him.

'Will,' Mike says. His voice is all wrecked.

Mike doesn't look like a hero. Not like the kid who came up with the idea to set fire to the Mind Flayer's tunnels, or the kid who walked off a cliff without looking back. He just looks lost.

'I thought you,' Mike says, lip trembling. 'I thought—'

'It's okay,' Will says. 'I'm okay now.'

Without thinking he reaches up to brush the tear away from Mike's cheek. Mike gives a sort of shuddering breath, and then his hand is tangling in Will's hair and he's kissing him.

But Will can't – this doesn't make any sense, is it a joke? He can't move, he can't even breathe –

And before he can decide what to do, Mike pulls back. He looks stricken, all the blood drained from his face.

'I'm sorry,' Mike says, squeezing his hands between his knees and looking down. 'I was just – I'm a little messed up right now.'

'N-no,' Will manages.

'I'm not gay,' Mike says quickly. 'I like Eleven, so. We kissed already.'

'Oh,' says Will, feeling sick.

Mike stands up, and he looks angry now. He shifts his weight from foot to

foot, rubs a hand over his face.

'I don't know,' he bursts out. 'You're gone and then you come back but then she's gone and you're – and now you're both here – and – I – I didn't mean to kiss you, okay, I didn't mean to.'

'Mike,' Will says desperately, 'I don't care, let's just forget it.'

I can't lose you.

He thinks he understands. Mike's picked up on how Will feels about him, and – It's just like Mike, and his stupid thing about always being there for Will, to try to give him this, too, even though it's something he can't really give.

Will really wishes he hadn't tried. Now he just feels worse.

Mike still looks afraid. His eyes flick to the window, like he's looking for an escape route.

'Okay,' Mike says eventually, giving an awful grimace of a smile. 'Let's forget about it.'

*

The castle, too, is covered all over with tangling wild roses. The unicorn has barely galloped out of the forest when Will scrambling off, running to the enormous double doors and heaving at the closest one. It's impossibly heavy, but when he pushes with all his weight, it opens a crack.

Will squeezes through and thunders across the marble floor, his sneakers slipping madly.

He screams, 'Mike! Mike,' and his voice shatters into thousands of echoes, but there's no answer.

Instinctively he ascends the vast marble staircase, taking the stairs three at a time. When he reaches the top he sprints down the hall, pushing open all the doors he can find. Empty, empty, empty: then, suddenly, from down the hall, drifts the sweet scent of roses.

He follows it, down the edge of the hall to a plain wooden door. He pushes it open.

He's in a bedroom filled with roses, which have grown in from the outside and tangled over the walls and around the bedposts where someone, someone dark-haired and gangly, is sleeping.

Will runs over to Mike and shakes his shoulders desperately. He is terrifyingly still, but otherwise he looks like he could have been awake five seconds ago: his cheeks are flushed, his hair a little messy on the pillow.

'Mike,' Will sobs. 'Please. Please wake up.'

He has a sudden, awful thought and tugs the hourglass out of his pocket. There are only a few silvery grains left, but they're still there.

'Mike,' he screams, his voice going raw, and *something* materialises out of thin air.

It's the – the elf, or the fairy, or whatever it is. Will clenches his fists. They're laughing tinklingly.

'Will,' they admonish. 'You've read all the fairy tales a hundred times. You must know what comes next.'

Will scowls, feeling himself blush hotly. 'You're joking.'

He feels sick all of a sudden. What if this – this whole thing was some kind of horrible joke? What if they knew how he felt about Mike, and they – they're just messing with him?

They laugh delightedly.

'No joke, Will. A game, remember? What an adorable combination you humans are of stupidity and sentiment. One comes to me completely unprotected, and the second follows without a backwards glance! Usually, it takes much more effort to lure a human away.'

'Was any of it even real?' Will spits. 'The dragon? The forest?'

'Of course it as real. As this is, now.'

‘You said it was just a game.’

Compulsively, he glances at the hourglass. The last grains of silvery dust are trickling through its neck –

‘Oh, it is a game – to us,’ the fairy says, laughing. ‘Not always for the humans we play with. Your sweet little hearts break so easily – as yours is about to. A shame, really, that you should make it this far and still lose.’

‘No,’ Will whispers, and turns to Mike.

His eyes are still closed, dark lashes curling on his cheeks. Frantically he presses his lips to Mike’s. They’re so cold.

He draws back. Mike is completely still; Will can’t even see his chest moving.

‘Mike,’ Will shouts, gripping his shoulders, shaking him as roughly as he can without hurting him.

He turns to scream at the fairy, but they’ve disappeared.

No. This can’t be happening. it can’t be.

‘Please,’ Will sobs, and kisses Mike again.

Nothing.

‘Mike,’ he says, feeling himself begin to cry. ‘Please– I didn’t– The time hadn’t run out!’

If only he’d kissed him straight away. Why had he waited even a second?

Maybe this is all a dream, he tells himself desperately.

Only – Mike’s there, in front of him, painfully real, down to the sleep-dust in his eyes and the familiar freckle on his ear-lobe. And horribly still.

Will presses his forehead to Mike’s, tears flowing freely now.

‘Mike,’ he says, and kisses him again, but he’s losing hope.

Then Mike’s lips move, just barely, in response to Will’s. They feel – warmer. Will draws back to see Mike’s eyes flutter. He can hardly breathe. Is he–

‘Will?’ Mike says sleepily, and Will gives a weird, choked laugh and squeezes Mike’s freezing hand so hard that Mike winces a little. ‘Hey.’

‘Sorry. You’re *okay* ,’ he says, still not quite believing it.

‘Did you just.. kiss me?’ Mike says, the words a little slurred.

‘Yes,’ Will says, face flaming. ‘I – I had to, to break the spell.’

Mike stares up at him, giving huge, slow blinks.

‘Oh,’ he says eventually, in a small voice, and struggles to sit up properly. Will helps him lean against the headboard. ‘To break the spell. Right.’

‘Yeah,’ Will says, his face flaming. ‘So.’

Mike’s a little pink, too. They’re still looking at one another. Will thinks of how it felt, fighting the dragon, and saving the fawn, and charging through the forest.

How is any of that worth it if he can’t even do this, now?

‘Mike, I–’

He doesn’t bother trying to find the words. Just leans in and kisses him again.

Mike laughs a little into the kiss, drapes his arms around around Will’s neck and kisses him back.

It’s a little awkward. They bump teeth.

Then Mike pulls away – Will wishes he hadn’t.

Excitedly, he says, ‘Oh, yeah.’ He still doesn’t seem to realise where they are, what’s going on. Maybe he’s still a bit loopy. ‘Will, I found

an elf! Like in the Elves and the Shoemaker!’

‘Yes,’ says Will darkly, ‘I met it.’

‘Happy birthday.’

‘You are *such* an idiot,’ Will tells him in frustration.

‘An idiot you just kissed.’ Will feels his face heating up, but then Mike goes on, ‘Told you. Romantic as hell.’

Will blushes even harder than before, if that’s possible. Finally, Mike looks around, screws his face up as he gets a faceful of pale pink roses.

‘Hey, where *are* we?’ he says, not seeming as bothered as he ought to be.

‘It’s... a long story,’ says Will, not sure how much Mike will remember of how he got in this room. ‘But we should get out of here.’

Mike looks Will up and down. ‘You’re all scratched – and *bleeding*. And your *hand* –’ Oh, yeah. Will had forgotten about his hand. He looks down at it; it looks pretty blistered. ‘What’s going on, Will?’

There’s a noise outside – like a roar – and they both freeze.

‘Let’s go,’ Will tells him.

Mike tries to stand up, but his legs give way – Will tries to catch him, but all that happens is they both go crashing into the ground. Mike giggles into Will’s chest.

Then the ground shakes, and at the same time there is a huge crashing sound, pretty similar to what a dragon body-slamming into the wall of a castle would sound like.

‘Mike,’ Will says urgently. ‘We gotta hurry.’

But Mike can’t even lift himself to his knees.

'I feel like I'm made of Play-Doh,' he complains.

'It's all right,' Will says, surprised at how calm he sounds. 'I can carry you.'

*

Will hurries down the staircase, torn between wanting to sprint and wanting to walk at a snail's pace so he doesn't jog Mike too badly. He compromises with a sort of stumbling run.

Mike doesn't seem to grasp the calamity that is the bloodthirsty dragon trying to break down the castle wall. He's smiling to himself.

'You know I've wanted to kiss you since like fifth grade?' Mike tells him as Will slip-slides across the marble floor towards the doors.

'Really?' Will says, distracted for a second.

'Yup,' says Mike. 'Hey. Do you get it now?'

'Huh?'

'How it feels,' Mike says. 'Doing the carrying. S'easy when it's you.'

At first Will doesn't really get what he means, but then he realises that Mike isn't really talking about sprained ankles.

What would it have been like, Will thinks. If everything had happened the opposite way?

He would've done anything to get Mike back.

And would he have minded, if Mike was different after? Sadder, heavier, quieter?

Of course he wouldn't. It's Mike.

*

They somehow get safely into the tangled rose garden before the dragon sees them. But he knows it's only a matter of time; even if the forest hides them, there's the huge expanse of bare land before the

cave. And he doesn't even know if that's the way out.

Will makes a decision.

He lets Mike gently down beside a white rose bush, hoping it'll hide him from view.

'Wait here, okay? Don't move.'

Mike instantly tries to get up.

'Mike,' Will says firmly, and places a hand on his shoulder. 'You have to listen to me, okay. Stay here.'

Mike frowns. Will knows he hates being told what to do, but can he cut Will some slack? He thinks this is the first time he's given Mike an order in his entire life.

'Promise,' says Will urgently.

Mike sighs.

'I promise.'

But it's too late. Will hears the beat of wings. He leaves Mike and runs to meet the dragon before it sees him.

The dragon lands in front of Will, flames tornadoing from its mouth and incinerating all the tangled roses around it into ash. Will's throat stings with the smoke. Coughing, he brings the sword above his head.

'Leave,' Will shouts hoarsely. 'Leave now, or I'll *kill* you, I swear it.'

He's sure the dragon can understand him; it gives what looks like a grotesque grin. Smoke is still pouring out of its nostrils; its mouth opens and flames spill out towards them, but Will somehow knows what to do. He holds up the sword and it glows, absorbing the flames.

'Go,' Will shouts, advancing.

But the dragon doesn't listen. It is looking past Will; its pupils snap into slits. *No*.

Mike, the *idiot*, has pulled himself to his feet.

Will runs at the dragon and swings, but it's too late; it has launched itself into the air. He turns and runs for Mike, runs the hardest he's ever run in his life. The dragon's descending, and Mike's shakily supporting himself against the roses, holding this useless broken branch like that's gonna protect him –

The dragon flames. Mike manages to dive out of the way, but he falls weakly to the ground and dragon's already opening its jaws–

'No,' Will screams, launching forward, and he brings the sword – glowing, burning, blazing – straight down on the dragon's neck.

This time, it doesn't bounce off.

The dragon's lifeless body falls in a slow-motion arc to the ground. Its black, clawed, scaly arm crashes down straight onto Mike, who whimpers and struggles to get out from underneath it.

Will runs to him, but Mike's already managed to get free. Will pulls him to his feet.

Mike looks at the blood-streaked sword in Will's hand – it's gone dull stone-grey now – and gives a strained laugh.

'Shit,' he says.

'Yeah,' says Will. Both of them are carefully not looking at the dragon's body.

Will remembers something he read in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and kneels to wipe the sword on the grass.

'I mean,' Mike babbles at him, 'I know we almost died and all, but that was, uh. Hot.'

'What?' says Will, completely confused.

Before Mike can answer there is a thundering of hooves. It's the stag and the unicorn. The unicorn nudges Will hello, then kneels by Mike and does its impatient head shake.

Mike understands and climbs right onto it. Will makes sure Mike's got a good hold of the mane before he climbs on to the stag himself.

As they gallop, the roses turn to vast, black trees; then to pale, strangely familiar birches.

'Can you hear that?' says Mike suddenly.

'*Will*,' two familiar voices are screaming. '*Mike*.'

The stag and the unicorn come to a halt. The unicorn jerks its head again, like, 'Ride's over, folks.'

They climb awkwardly down. Mike can stand on his own now, but he still seems a bit shaky. So Will carefully takes his arm and drapes it around his own shoulders. He turns to say goodbye to the unicorn and the stag, but they're gone.

The dark wood are gone, too. It's all birches and pines. Will's right hand is tingling and itching; he looks down to see the blisters shrinking, the bright red shininess fading away until his hand looks like it always did.

In the distance are two stumbling figures, hands clasped together.

'Jonathan,' Will shouts. 'Nancy. We're here.'

When Jonathan and Nancy arrive, both Will and Mike are suddenly hit with a belated wave of exhaustion. There are fresh tears on Jonathan's cheeks. Everything seems to sink in, how *close* they came to—

'I'm sorry,' Mike says in this small voice. He's looking at Will, his face stricken. 'For going out alone. I was so stupid. We could've died.'

'You didn't —' Will begins, but Nancy shouts,

'Stupid doesn't fucking *begin* to cover it,' and then Jonathan's yelling

at Will, and then somehow everyone's crying at once.

Mike flies at Nancy for a hug, and she hugs him tightly back, still letting out a stream of swear-words. Jonathan, meanwhile, has fallen quiet – he's never been able to stay angry at Will for long. Suddenly, he drops to his knees and opens his arms. Will runs over and hugs his big brother so tight he thinks he must be squeezing all the breath out of him.

'I'm okay,' Will tells him. He can feel Jonathan shaking. 'I'm sorry. I had to go alone, or it wouldn't have worked.'

'Let's just get you home,' says Jonathan. He sounds so tired.

They all walk slowly back to Jonathan's car. Will's leaning into Jonathan and Nancy's supporting Mike. Connecting the Wheelers and the Byers are Will and Mike's tightly clutched hands.

*

Jane is teaching Will how to play Hearts, which she learned from Hopper and is blisteringly good at, when Mike walks into the Byers' living room. Jane beams up at him.

'Mike,' she says, like she always does, like she's seeing him again for the first time in a year. She gets up to hug him. He hugs her back tightly, his eyes squeezing shut.

'Uh,' says Will pointedly. 'Hi.'

'I'm getting to you,' says Mike over Jane's shoulder.

'Patience is a virtue,' Jane tells Will, and grins at him. She's really into idioms at the moment; she finds them hilarious for some reason. 'Look it's raining cats and dogs,' she'll announce whenever it's wet out, and collapse into giggles.

'I haven't seen you all day,' Will complains to Mike after he's leaned down to kiss him hello.

'I've been working on your Christmas present,' Mike tells him. Will feels a little jolt of anxiety. 'S'okay. I'm not being stupid this time.'

Jane ruffles Will's hair, and bounces to her feet. It's funny, because when Jane first met Max she was straight-up *awful* to her, and they worked out it was because she thought Mike liked her. But she's never once seemed jealous – or anything less than adoring – of Will.

Dustin says it's because Jane's gone off soap operas, and Mike, sappily, always says it 'cause Will's impossible to hate; but Will's private theory is that Jane's realised she likes somebody else.

Jane jumps up. 'I'm going round to Jennifer's,' she says, and smiles to herself, further confirming Will's suspicions.

'El's been spending a lot of time with Jennifer lately,' Mike says, completely oblivious. 'You wanna go out for a walk or something?'

Will twists his mouth. 'Or we could hang out in your room like yesterday?' There's not much to do in Will's bedroom: they usually lie there and talk, or read to one another, or nap, or kiss, or play cards sometimes. It must get so boring for Mike. Will loves hanging out with him more than anything, but he wishes he was able to be a better boyfriend.

'Sure you don't mind?' he says.

Magical adventures are life-changing and all, but they don't solve all your problems. Will still has a lot bad days. Mike's good with them, though.

'Don't you get it?' Mike had told him easily, when Will confessed how afraid he was that he'd tire Mike out or weigh him down. 'I don't care if you have a million bad days. Even at your worst, you're still Will.'

Mike kisses Will softly.

'Sure I don't mind,' he says, and grabs Will's hand and leads him down the hall.

Author's Note:

Hey guys, thanks so much for reading ^^ I'm [douxamers](#) on tumblr!